LITTLE BLUE BOOK NO. 1385
Edited by E. Haldeman-Julius

A Defense of the Devil

THE WORLD, THE FLESH AND SATAN COMING INTO THEIR OWN

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The world, the flesh, and the devil! With what eloquent exhortations, by what agonizing self-mutilations, through what frightful applications of fire and sword have the hosts of the Holy Ghost striven to destroy the power of that trinity of the damned! And yet the solid old earth spins on, heedless of those upon it who cry out for its destruction, the body ceaselessly insists upon the fulfilment of its desires, and His Satanic Majesty daily gathers fresh recruits for his unremitting assaults upon the citadel of the Lord Almighty.

There have always been two attitudes toward this bizarre atomic dance called the universe into which man is thrust willy-nilly to whirl for a while and perish. One is to cry out against it in wails of despair and to seek peace in dreaming dreams of a more satisfying dwelling place after this one has sucked him back into its maelstrom. The other is that of boldly facing the situation, accepting the cosmos as it is, and securing his happiness by conforming himself to its rigid requirements. Although Jesus and Omar Khayyam were made immortal by words placed in their mouths by men more clever than they, they perhaps typify best these opposite standpoints. In fact, it is the latter who sums up man's reactions toward the world, when he is made to say:

> Some for the glories of this world; and some
> Sigh for the Prophet's paradise to come.

That we are in the world, but not of it, has

been the constant refrain of all the supernatural religions that have controlled the aspirations of mankind. We are immortal souls, they preach, imprisoned for a time in hated flesh, that through the spurned temptations of the physical world, we may be made worthy to enter our everlasting home. The world with its deceptive beauty, the flesh with its alluring seductions, and the devil with his blasphemous sophistries are the enemies which the sojourner in this vale of tears must fight. It is a doctrine which originated in the sweltering and fever-laden East, captured and brought to dogmatic perfection by the Christian Fathers, who placed it in words of appealing beauty upon the lips of a Galilean peasant. At first eagerly received by oppressed slaves in the hope of securing freedom, it was, through a stroke of fortune and by dint of imperial decrees, spread over three continents; with the result that it has soaked into the very marrow of our bones, colored art and literature and customs and the innermost thoughts of our lives for two thousand years.

Its acceptance by the majority of half-civilized mankind is due, I believe, to three fundamental causes — ignorance of our own natures which science is now dispelling, our monumental conceit which makes us believe that we are so important in the schemes of the Eternal that the labor pains of creation were suffered solely to bring us forth and our sheer terror when confronted by the grimmer and more unfriendly aspects of existence. So we have cursed the world in which we live, we

revile the body which it has made for us, and we cast out the evil spirit which would reconcile us to them.

Is it not time to stop and ask ourselves whether this teaching of old men in caves, moaning over their burnt-out passions, these dreams of those afraid to face reality or oppressed by its harshness, have not led mankind astray in its search for ultimate happiness? Whether the world, the flesh, and the devil, so long under excommunication, are really the evils which we have been importuned so long to consider them?

When the authors of the New Testament exhorted their followers not to be children of this world, they were denouncing that outlook on life which we call today Materialism. It is a much abused word, seldom defined, but cursed with more furious anathemas than those the rabbis of Amsterdam hurled upon the head of Spinoza. It has been the specter at which the cobweb-spinning metaphysicians have shuddered since the days of Democritus. To whisper the word in the Sacred Temples is to let loose a passionate fury of denunciation behind which a discerning eye may sometimes glimpse a chattering of teeth. In such evil repute has the word been held that even many of those who share the viewpoint it represents have joined in its proscription. It has come to stand, philosophically, for the denial of the existence of everything that cannot be directly perceived by the senses and, ethically, for the ideals of "each man for himself, the devil take

the hindermost" and "eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die."

In order to explain what Materialism really stands for, it is necessary to clear away these misrepresentations. Those metaphysicians who occupy their days in attempting to discover of what stuff the universe is composed "in itself" naturally suppose that materialists, indulging in the same pastime, have their own theory to offer. It is assumed that the latter consider matter to be the fundamental substance of which reality is made. But the truth is that Materialism not only holds no such naive conception, but raises a protest against that philosophy which shuts itself up in a tower and spins from its brain a labyrinthian system which, in the words of Sir E. Ray Lankester, is a search in the dark by a blind man for a black cat that is not there. Chapman Cohen, in a recent little work "Materialism Restated" puts it thus: "What exists outside of consciousness we shall be able to determine only when a man is able to pick himself up by the waistband of his trousers and carry himself around the room." As to what things are "in themselves" Materialism has no theory whatsoever to offer.

It is said that Materialism has broken down because modern physicists have discovered matter to be a much more complicated thing than their predecessors had supposed. For some unknown reason, every writer of philosophy seems to tie Materialism to certain physical theories of the nineteenth century, and then, when these have been discarded, to raise the cry, "Materialism is dead!" If so, it creates

much stir in the world for a lifeless corpse. To read present-day literature on the subject, one would think that all the scientists of the last century were Materialists, while those of today have almost to a man abjured the heresy of their forerunners. It is a matter of historical record that very few in the first rank of science in the eighteen hundreds held that philosophy while at the present time a great many first rank names proclaim their allegiance to its banner. A little research into the controversial literature of the Victorian Age would reveal that its death-knell was sounded time and time again during what we now call the "Materialistic Century."

As a matter of fact, Materialism is not concerned with any particular theory of the nature of matter. Matter is but a short-hand term used to explain certain movements in nature. Were it discarded, the Materialist would not lose an ounce of sleep.

The fundamental proposition of Materialism is merely that the universe gives rise to its various forms through the action of its own inherent forces, and not through the operation of an external spirit upon "dead" matter. It asserts that to explain any occurrence, whether it be the revolution of a planet, the rise of life, or the thoughts of the mind of man, is to describe the conditions under which that event has taken place. The Materialist knows of no compulsion in nature which "forces" one set of happenings to produce another. He merely makes a formula expressing what takes place and calls it a "law." Farther than this the

human mind cannot go. He rejects the ideas of "spirit" and "vital force" because, standing for nothing intelligible, they are merely mystical terms employed to cover our ignorance and because, instead of explaining anything, they merely add a further mystery to the problem. To quote Prof. Henshaw Ward (in "The Ways of the Weevil; Some Reflections of a Materialist," Harper's, November, 1925): "No sensible scientist denies that an infinity of spirit may exist beyond his laws. He denies only that he has found any spirits at work in thunder or trees."

The Materialist applies the same principles to the group of phenomena called "mind" that he does to the rest of nature. Mind, as well as body, has undergone a long evolution. It has appeared only under certain conditions. Under certain conditions it becomes diseased. Under other conditions its manifestations cease. It is true that we know as yet very little of those conditions, but when they are fully known, mind will have been explained as far as it is possible to explain it. To posit an unintelligible soul inhabiting the body is to give up science for the speculations of the savage and introduces a further complication which, in its turn, must be explained. It is for those who scorn Materialism to prove that the mind exists independently of the circumstances in which it is found.

Materialism, then, on its philosophical side, stands in opposition to the separation in thought of things that are inseparable in fact, such as matter and motion, life and organism,

spirit hovering over and organizing dead and chaotic clay. Nature produces through the workings of her own inherent energies.

This is the modern form of that gospel of the glories of this world, so vigorously denounced from the pulpit and the chair. But however they may attempt to stem the tide, the mind of man is slowly turning from the Prophet's paradise to come to the wonders which this homely and neglected ball has in store for him. That patient exploration of facts which we call science is revealing to us that we are not only in this world, but of it—body, mind, and soul. Whether we like it or not, we must accept the fact that our mother is the long-despised dirt beneath our feet—but what marvelous dirt it is! Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick has a phrase which he applies to the theory of Materialism and with which he routs the doubts of puzzled freshmen—"*A handful of dirt going it blind.*" And when he utters that phrase with all the scorn of which a brother of the cloth is capable and winds it up with the question, "Can this have produced man?" embryo atheists, ashamed, are ready to receive holy communion. But this despised handful of dust is really an amazing thing, as our clerical friend will discover if he will take the trouble to read what the physicists have to say about it. When the scientist probes into that fistful of mud, he finds words of which the miracle-mongers never dreamed and an interplay of forces before which man must stand in awe more profound than the reverence of Moses when he viewed the back parts of the Elohim.

If this world is not friendly, neither is it unfriendly. Being unconscious, it is totally indifferent to our welfare. We cannot bow down to it in humiliating worship nor by burning candles or incense before it, wheedle from it the satisfaction of our desires. But we can search out its secrets and apply our discoveries to the increase of human happiness. We can admire its more lovely phases and, through patient study of it, reduce to a minimum its more destructive aspects. When we once understand that it is our home, we shall cease despising it, attempting, instead, to set it in order, and make it as beautiful a home as possible.

But, objects the voice from the temple, if we are but chemical by-products of an unconscious universal process, why then Giordano Bruno burning at the stake is no more heroic than a drunken sot expiring in the gutter. If there is no Supreme Judge Behind Things, then there can be no criterion by which the value of human actions can be judged. Man, considering himself but a conglomeration of dancing atoms, will proceed to rob, kill, drink himself to death. Values, in order to be genuine, must be fixed, unalterable, and eternal, imposed on the world by some Supreme Arbiter.

To which the Materialist replies, "Why?" If all present ethical ideals were destroyed by a universal acceptance of Materialism, obviously society, for its own self-protection, would have to set up a new code, based on the necessities of the situation in which it would find itself. Perhaps the code would be different from the

present in many respects. Perhaps some acts that are now considered good would be then labeled evil, and vice versa. But a standard of values it would be compelled to formulate, or it would perish.

And that happens to be just what the Materialist desires—a morality based, not upon unchanging laws promulgated by some being more powerful than man, but upon human needs alone. He would like to see every present standard examined in the light of reason and experience, to discover whether it tends toward the happiness of the race. If it cannot bear being brought out into the light of criticism, it should be thrown upon the junk-heap of outworn prejudices. If it is valid, it will stand the test.

What if our sense of values echoes no response in the outside universe? What if our ideals are not eternal? If Nature makes no distinction betwen the martyrdom of Bruno and the death of a victim of alcohol, man does and always will. Where has the assumption of a supreme judge of conduct led us? It has set up a false code which makes sins out of acts which are not sinful and virtues out of deeds that are anti-social. It has led to cruel persecution of those whose ideas of an omnipotent will differed from the conceptions of those in power. It is blocking the way at present to a sane solution of the moral problems we now face. In the name of an Almighty Bench every attempt to examine the sex question, the question of birth control, punishment of criminals, drinking of intoxicants, in the light of reason

and on the merits of the case is condemned as blasphemous and anarchistic.

Since there never has been an agreement as to the divine will toward man, why not turn the searchlight of science upon our past experiences, past triumphs, and past mistakes, and from the lessons we learn build our own values, designed to promote our well-being here and now? It might be worth trying.

One of the greatest hindrances to a sane revaluation of ethical standards is the pious contempt for the human body as the prison-house of an immortal soul, the logical result of the dualism which separates the universe into two opposing factions, moving spirit and dead matter. It is a conception which originated in the savage's interpretation of his shadow, was brought to philosophic perfection in the fantasies of Plato, and found its practical application in those hermits who sat starving in their filth in the caves of the Thebaid. It lingers on today, not only in the churches but in our most advanced literature, and in the sentiment that certain desires of the body are in themselves unclean.

"For that which is born of the flesh is flesh," said Jesus, "But that which is born of the spirit is spirit." For twenty centuries the world sang hosannas to his wisdom. Then along came certain wise men of the Idealistic school who profoundly intoned, "For that which is born of the spirit is spirit; but that which is born of the flesh is spirit, too. Nothing exists but mind." Now arises Dr. John B. Watson and smilingly shakes his head. "Both of you are in error,"

says he. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; but that which is of the spirit is also born of the flesh. The spirit is but a name given in ignorance to certain movements of the unstriped muscles."

What we have called the soul is discovered to have its foundations in the structure and movements of the body. The state of a man's liver will determine his outlook on life. An accident to the brain will convert a saint into a criminal. All the evidence as yet brought forth seems to indicate that thought has the same relation to the nervous system as digestion has to the stomach. We do not know all the chemical details involved in the process of absorbing our food, but because of our ignorance we do not call in a spiritual principle to aid us in our explanations. Neither do we know completely the physiological relations between thought and gray matter. Were our thinking process not paralyzed by that Oriental philosophy that pervades even our unconscious thought habits, we should not dream of treating the relation of mind to body in a manner different from our treatment of any other relationship between function and structure, merely because our knowledge is not complete.

It is around this question that the final struggle with materialism will be fought. And the issue of it will determine the ethical standards of the future. If our every thought, from that of mere physical comfort to our loftiest "spiritual" aspirations, has a physical basis in the body's structure and environment, the ideal of the earth-minded philosophers of ancient pa-

ganism—"a healthy mind in a healthy body"—must form again the basis of a sane morality. If that ideal prevails, then no longer will our sex-life be clouded by the assumption that the works of the flesh are of themselves evil. No longer will man mortify his physical nature to the greater glory of his soul. No longer will a too intense spirituality prove a breeding ground for neuroses. The theory of a "free will" will cease to justify mistreatment of the criminal members of the human family.

The sickly ideal of Christion piety will be replaced by a healthy sensualism, a reasonable enjoyment of the pleasures of the body, unaccompanied by the old "sense of sin." If the mind is sick, we will no longer raise pleading hands to heaven for a cure, but will seek to locate causes in the bodily structure and the environment. Analysis will take the place of prayer as a means of cleaning the mind of its impurities, as it has already done in the case of physical diseases.

As for the third member of the Unholy Three, like Mark Twain, I have always had a furtive admiration for His Satanic Majesty, Lucifer, well named the bearer of light. The tale of his magnificent rebellion against the throne of Omnipotence is the most thrilling of all the narratives of sacred history.

Perhaps, when his side of the story is adequately presented, it will be found that he, like so many other heroes of history, has been maligned. It is a pity that Lucifer has left no memoirs of the first days of his dissipation. We must secure our information from the writ-

ings of his foes—sure to be a prejudiced source. But, if we read between the lines of that literature, unblinded by the sway it has had over the minds of men, I think we shall find even therein sufficient justification for his revolt.

In the first place, the universe that existed before the days of "material creation" was an absolute monarchy. There was not even an advisory board to the ruler. Some of his edicts, issued after the storm had broken, show a ruthlessness which indicates that he had permitted his almighty power to go to his head. For instance, if a certain number of men in a primeval town had committed a crime, that town was burned to the ground with everyone in it, innocent and guilty alike. If a few children poked fun at the shiny pate of one of his propagandists, he turned loose a flock of bears on them. These incidents give the inquirer a clue to the real situation.

Of course, there was plenty of leisure in the Kingdom of Heaven. There was no work to do except such duties as parading, standing impressively at the imperial gates, and playing in an orchestra or singing in a choir. But we can well understand that a keen student of angelic nature might feel that such idleness was demoralizing and that the world was getting nowhere. It was just one eternal round of singing flattering praises of the suzerain. To one who was at all ambitious this state of affairs was sure to lead to insupportable boredom, not to say disgust. Give the citizens some stars to haul in and out or some suns to push around and they would be far happier than if

they played continuously those tiresome melodies on their harps.

Although I can find no documentary evidence on the point, I am convinced that Lucifer had worked his way through sheer ambition from the humbler ranks of angelic society to the post of Prime Minister. Had he been born amid the luxuries of the royal court, his youthful environment would have fashioned him into a snobbish aristocrat and an upholder of things as they were. I picture him living a simple life amid the pomps of the palace, secretly scorning the effeminacy of the satellites of the throne.

It seems that Lucifer desired some sort of democracy wherein the common angels might have a voice in determining what sort of lives they should lead. Jehovah's reply to their complaints—there must have been complaints, else whence did Satan secure his followers?—was inevitably, "Why, you are all happy and prosperous. I give you wings to take you wherever you please and beautiful harps on which to sing of what I have done for you. What are you complaining about? In heaven's name this is heaven, isn't it?" This did not satisfy Lucifer, no more than did his lord's constant boasting of his righteousness and sanctity. His very soul burst with indignation at the soft phrases and smug smiles with which Jehovah stubbornly refused to make any change whatsoever in his mode of government. "The same yesterday, today, and forever"—oh that he could tear down those abominable words from the door of the sacred palace!

And so he brooded. Merely because Jehovah had brought him and his fellow angels into existence, he surely had no right to control their every action or decide the issues of right and wrong. Might did not make right. Every angel was entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness in his own way, so long as there was no interference with the rights of others. "Anarchy!" said that perfect product of the present regime—Michael. And why did not the Lord permit his subjects to enjoy creating things of their own, say, other angels, and form delightful little groups which might be called family circles because of their nearness to each other? How Michael stuck up his nose at that suggestion! Had Lucifer no sense of decency? Well then, at least give them something to do, set some goal to which they might aspire. "Work?" gasped Michael. "Some people are never satisfied. Work? When the Lord can create everything in the blinking of an eye?" When Satan would protest that the present situation was slavery of the most abject kind, because the angels did not see their true subjection behind the softness of their life, Michael simply did not understand. A good fellow in many ways, this Michael, and a very efficient captain of the Imperial Bodyguard. But a born and bred reactionary, and a bit supercilious toward this dreaming upstart product of the slums.

Lucifer began to sound out others. He found that there was a considerable body of angels who were secretly thinking his thoughts. Slowly he organized an opposition party. Then,

when he felt that he had sufficient backing, he presented an ultimatum to the throne. We can surmise that Jehovah was adamant until he feared that the spreading discontent might unseat him. Then he began to compromise. He created the material universe, spoiling it all by placing therein the Garden of Eden, where the new creatures were to continue in the life the angels were leading. Henry L. Mencken observes that rebellions never occur against a despotism until the despot makes concessions. It was Jehovah's concession to the Luciferians that made Lucifer first doubt his liege's omnipotence. His master had always proclaimed himself all-powerful, but had his power ever been tested? He also proclaimed himself just and righteous and reasonable, but mere statement was for from proof.

When Jehovah planted the tree of knowledge in the garden, with the prohibition to eat of its fruit, Lucifer, exasperated, drew his sword. The result we know. The trained royal army under the able leadership of Michael, after a terrific struggle, overthrew the unorganized horde of rebels. I say, after a terrific struggle, for even in his defeat Lucifer was strong enough to force terms from his former monarch, whereby he was granted the privilege of exercising a certain control over the recently created race of man.

That struggle has continued throughout the history of man. Until recent times the advantage has been with Jehovah. He has used his power to slander those in revolt against him. But Lucifer, the spirit of rebellion

against things-as-they-are, has slowly gathered unto himself an array of brilliant human beings who are at last arousing the respect of the world. Bruno the martyr, Voltaire, Darwin, Spinoza were inspired by him. So influential were they in changing the opinions of mankind that now the defenders of the Lord are proclaiming that these men were fighting on their side! But those of their generation knew where to place them and consigned them speedily to the devil. Of course Satan has been accused of every crime on the calendar. Is not that the propaganda issuing from every war? Even so have every one of his followers been indicted for inspiring immorality. But it seems to me that these men, excommunicated for traffic with the so-called Evil One, have been the emancipators of their race.

There can be no compromise Ye cannot serve both God and Beelzebub. Jehovah has long prevailed. But now the spirit of this world, backed by the new reinforcement with which science has provided him, is taking fresh courage, and the world, the flesh, and the devil are at last coming into their own.

THE IDEAS OF A PERFECT CYNIC

AMBROSE BIERCE MADE A BUSINESS OF CRACKING SKULLS

C. Hartley Grattan

Of all the writers who did their most substantial work between the close of the Civil War and 1900 Ambrose Bierce was the only one who carried on an active, open, uncompromis-

ing war with the environment that was oppressive to them all. Henry and William James, Mark Twain, Howells, Bret Harte, John Burroughs, all compromised in their various ways. Hamlin Garland and Frank Norris started out bravely enough but gave up after a while. Sydney Lanier and William Vaughn Moody revolted incidentally. Most of the popular writers did not even know that there was anything to be uneasy about. They were dead from the beginning. Instead of, like Mark Twain, expressing his protest by indirection (as with "Huckleberry Finn" and "Life on the Mississippi") or posthumously (as in "What Is Man?" and "The Mysterious Stranger"), Bierce was out in the open from the beginning. He made a business of cracking skulls and ideas. Product of three disillusioning experiences, pioneer life, war and journalistic uproars, he ended up with almost nothing that he could regard as sacred. He was an all-inclusive cynic.

So many of Bierce's ideas are held by the commonalty today that a detailed rehearsal of them may skirt closely upon the domain of platitude. Furthermore, it has been Bierce's misfortune that while his ideas have gone into the common stock of most thinking men, his name has been detached from them, and so his credit as an originator is small. This is highly unfortunate, for men of little originality can today pass as smart by parroting ideas that Bierce developed and expressed between 1881 and 1905. What his perverse thinking cost him is only too well known. Chief among his payments for thinking acutely in an age hostile to

the exercise of the critical intelligence—let alone the cynical intelligence—were unpopularity and obscurity. He resented both a good bit and took what joy he could out of his "notoriety as an obscurian," which he thought to be "world wide and apparently everlasting."

In the life of man Bierce found little that was inspiring. His finding can be phrased thus: Man, specifically (and generically) is not worthy of respect—nor is woman: "an animal usually living in the vicinity of man, and having a rudimentary susceptibility to domestication." Woman entangles man with the bait of her beauty. United in marriage, the only cure for that "temporary insanity," love, man and woman become slaves the one to the other. They go to live in a house: "A hollow edifice erected for the habitation of man, rat, mouse, beetle, cockroach, fly, mosquito, flea, bacillus and microbe." One boon they can confer upon another animal, childhood, but even that boon must be prefaced by a disgusting episode, infancy: "Childhood, *n.* The period of human life intermediate between the idiocy of infancy and the folly of youth—two removes from the sin of manhood and three from the remorse of age." That brief period between infancy and youth was all of life that Bierce discovered to be undefiled. With methodical persistence he proceeded from the day ("A period of twenty-four hours, mostly misspent,"), to the year, "a period of three hundred and sixty-five disappointments." Launched on a life dominated by such a calendar, the human animal can expect little and gets it. To be sure, in Bierce's view,

he has small equipment to rise superior to the ills that flesh is heir to. His head contains about as much brain as a cabbage. His heart is simply "an automatic, muscular blood-pump." The emotions and sentiments are generated in the stomach, "being evolved from food by chemical action of the gastric fluid." The principal motivating force in man is fear. In fact, he cannot even be sure that he is, for Descartes' famous epigram should really read, *Cogito cogito ergo cogito sum.*

The reigning dynasty in life and letters is the Dullards. Ability then is largely useless, but supposing one has the misfortune to be endowed with it, it will be found to be largely compounded of solemnity. Ambition, the prod to achievement, is an "overmastering desire to be vilified by enemies while living and made ridiculous by friends when dead." And even if ambition should lead to a certain achievement, nothing much is accomplished for achievement is "the death of endeavor and the birth of disgust." Any congratulations one may collect on the way to achievement are motivated by envy.

Logically, then, it is the height of folly to distinguish oneself in any way from the masses for any deviation from the ordinary is abnormal, and "to be abnormal is to be detested." Too great intellectual independence is "madness." The best course is conformity. Expect nothing of others in any case. Put aside romantic notions of friendship—a fair weather device only. Be sure that in adversity you will be privileged to contemplate your "friend's"

back. Contemplating those in adversity when one is safe from harm is productive of the greatest happiness. All beggars, by way of warning, are those who have "relied on the assistance of friends." Beware also of kindness; it is a "brief preface to ten volumes of exaction."

Be not misled into believing that your thinking is disinterested. Deliberation is merely "the act of examining one's bread to determine which side it is buttered on." When you are impartial you are simply unable to discover personal advantage in "espousing either side of a controversy or adopting either of two conflicting opinions." It will be found highly advantageous to be a hypocrite for then one "secures the advantage of seeming to be what one despises."

The end of life is the pursuit of pleasure, but one who overtakes pleasure is a debauchee. That is immoral which is inexpedient and that is inexpedient which is not "calculated to advance one's interest." It varies with circumstances. To act always with impunity one must be wealthy—and the measure of your respectability is your income. Wealth also allows one to cultivate a repose of manner that in the poor is called laziness.

The most acceptable end of life is failure, for success is "the one unpardonable sin against one's fellows." So, too, should life be short, even if not merry, for longevity is merely an "uncommon extension of the fear of death." And so in the end one is drawn out to the cemetery in a hearse ("death's baby carriage"), and deposited in a grave:

Done with the work of breathing; done
With all the world; the mad race run
Through to the end; the golden goal
Attained and found to be a hole!

One of Bierce's most frequently reiterated contentions was that an author must keep his heart out of head when writing. Bierce the human was quite different from Bierce the pen-man. All too frequently, however, the pen-man controlled his relations with friends and acquaintances. He could be quite unnecessarily nasty. But in marked contrast to the extraordinary asperities of his writing are the occasional stories about his humaneness, gentleness, charitableness and forgiveness toward those he genuinely liked. Just the same when he looked at the world he never failed to see something worse, if possible, than George Moore's pig-sty where the obscene in spirit wallow.

Take his notions of the literary world of his day. He once made the suggestion that the coat of arms of American literature should be an illiterate hoodlum, rampant, on a field of dead authors; motto: To Hell with Literature. Starting from the tools of authorship and working up he damned everything. To begin with: "Quill, *n.* An implement of torture yielded by a goose and commonly wielded by an ass. This use of the quill is now obsolete, but its modern equivalent, the steel pen, is wielded by the same everlasting Presence." The pen is chiefly in the hands of those more suitably employed at the plow. "Ink, *n.* A villainous compound of tanno-gallate of iron, gumarabic and water, chiefly used to facilitate the infection of idiocy and promote intellectual crime." Submitted to

an editor, who is "the trouble with American literature," a book, short story, article, poem or whatever it may be, on acceptance, which if it is meritorious is highly doubtful, falls victim to a publisher. Bierce's opinions of publishers would shrivel up this paper. Publishers he found guilty of every known kind of crime, the mildest being robbery. The publisher has the piece put into type, "pestilential bits of metal suspected of destroying civilization and enlightenment." The proof-reader attacks the effort and "atones for making your writing nonsense by permitting the compositor to make it unintelligible." Released to an indifferent, if not hostile, world, the effort falls to a critic, "a person who boasts himself hard to please because nobody tries to please him." The total result is zero.

Bierce had no respect for newspapers or magazines. Both he considered as obvious and necessary vehicles of whims, nonsensicalities, reform, blackguarding, muck-stirring, or expositions of the doctrines of Jesus Christ. Whatever purpose they were used for was neither here nor there. The one end they must serve was the making of money. He did not believe that a magazine editor ever consciously printed poetry and time and again during his lifetime he collected rejection slips acquired by sending around what he was sure was poetry (written by Sterling, Scheffauer or Loveman) with the object of using them to flatten the editors to the wall as judges of poetry some happy day when he finally did engineer publication. Although all his life long he wrote for the newspapers he largely despised the reams of stuff

he composed for that purpose. In his letters he scarcely mentioned his newspaper work with approval, but he always spoke respectfully of the checks it brought in.

One of the curious things about his career is the fact that he knew few writing men. In the roaring days on the San Francisco *Examiner* his health made it necessary for him to live in small mountain towns and so he was rarely about the office. In Washington (1896-1913) he consorted with army men almost exclusively. Edwin Markham, Jack London and Joachim Miller he knew slightly. Herman Scheffauer, George Sterling and Percival Pollard he knew more intimately, but not excessively so, and Pollard alone did he know as an equal. Sterling and Scheffauer were protegés. He met many others once or twice: Mark Twain, H. L. Mencken, Will Irwin, Arthur Brisbane and several more who are popularly alleged to have known him well. George Augustus Sala, whom Bierce himself claimed as an intimate, does not mention Bierce in his autobiography. G. R. Sims mentions him passingly to illustrate a point about John Camden Hotten. W. S. Gilbert drew a title page illustration for one of Bierce's London books (issued in the days when both were on *Fun*), but Dr. Isaac Goldberg can find no written record by Gilbert of this connection. Bierce dwelt alone so far as companionship of writing men went, and almost so in every other way. Yet Pollard wrote that in knowing Bierce he was certain that he had known a complete artist. This is a paradox to be resolved later.

None of the dominant writers of the day received his praise. Since he did not consider himself a critic he left no systematic record of his opinions. Howells he called the "lousy cat" of American letters. He recognized the talents of Upton Sinclair and Jack London, but deplored their social philosophies. His highest regard went to George Sterling. His particular hatred went to the dialect authors, as he called them: Hamlin Garland, Mary Wilkins Freeman and the "other curled darlings of the circulating libraries." He referred to the "Hoosier horrors of Riley and the barrack-room afflictions of Kipling." He once composed a rhyme that I think refers to Riley:

> His poems ——— says that he indites
> Upon an empty stomach. Heavenly powers,
> Feed him throat-full, for what he writes
> Upon his empty stomach empties ours.

He failed to see anything in either Bernard Shaw or Ibsen. In Gorky he found nothing but the essential peasant. He wanted to know what to do with the work of Wilde, "whose name one cannot speak before women." In his definition of "impossible" he used as an illustration "Walt Whitman's poetry and God's mercy to man." But he could find poems in Whittier, Longfellow, William Vaughn Moody and Sydney Lanier to admire. He singled out "Huckleberry Finn" as Twain's best book. He bitterly denounced Edwin Markham for writing "The Man with the Hoe." He admired the poetry of David Starr Jordan!

It is difficult to find a leading thread in this jumble of approvals and disapprovals. Better knowledge of what Bierce was about can be

obtained from a study of his literary ideals which are so high that they make us realize why he was so bitter about the reality he defined in the reflections quoted above. Bierce was a disciplinarian. He placed great emphasis on the technique of fiction and verse. He was constantly eager to be correct, and to see that others were correct in the details of punctuation even. More than anything else he sought precision in every part of composition from the placing of the commas, to sentence structure and the total effect of the finished whole. He advised young writers to study Spencer's essays on style. The passion he had for neatness and order is shown in his admiration for Pope's poetry—especially in his admiration for Pope's version of Homer though he knew it to be a falsification of Homer. Like Poe he had philosophical objections to the long poem and to the novel. A long poem, he insisted, must be bursts of poetry embedded in long passages best called *recitativo*. About the impossibility of the novel he was more emphatic:

> Novel, *n.* A short story padded. A species of composition bearing the same relation to literature that the panorama bears to art. As it is too long to be read at a sitting the impression made by its successive parts are successively effaced, as in the panorama. Unity, totality of effect, is impossible; for besides the few pages last read all that is carried in mind is the mere plot of what has gone before. To the romance the novel is what photography is to painting. Its distinguishing principle, probability, corresponds to the literal actuality of the photograph and puts it distinctly into the category of reporting; whereas the free wing of the romancer enables him to mount to such altitudes of imagination as he may be fitted to attain; and the

first three essentials of the literary art are imagination, imagination and imagination. The art of writing novels, such as it was, is long dead everywhere except in Russia, where it is new. Peace to its ashes—some of which have a large sale.

Time and again he returned to his emphasis on imagination as the essential ingredient of literature. He as constantly insisted that the emotions had no place in writing *until they had been been disciplined by the intelligence.* His hostility to realism was insistent. He saw no point in reproducing the flat tones of ordinary life. His own stories are consistent with his theory. He found an interesting topic only in the impingement of the unreal or the extraordinary on the natural tenor of events. His stories lose in general appeal because of their exceptional subject matter—and exceptionableness of such a nature as to be merely and needlessly horrible to the reader who is unable to get at Bierce's point of view. The product of an artist can be of the highest merit even if the range of the artist is limited. But a critic can hardly be of tremendous significance if his theories are largely dogmas on technique and especially if his sympathies are confined to such art forms as he is able to, or chooses to, practice. Bierce as a critic is of the same order as Poe—keen, just and salutary within a narrow range, but by and large of significance because of that narrowness. Bierce was wiser than Poe, however, because he did not claim to be a critic.

Once possessed of a highly polished technical equipment, a working imagination, a keen intelligence and disciplined emotions, one could think of becoming a serious writer and hope to become recognized as an artist. But even with this equipment there was a hard road to

be traversed before the heights could be reached. About the achievement of literary success, Bierce had positively romantic notions: he speaks of prayerful labors, of beseeching the gods and so on. Furthermore literature was to be clearly differentiated from journalism. The latter could be prostituted to any purpose, but the former could only be used to exhibit man in the grip of implacable, unknown fates. It was a high and serious matter not to be tampered with lightly to achieve petty aims. With such ideals is it any wonder that Bierce was disgusted with the commercialized literature? And need we longer wonder that Pollard found him an artist of the first water?

It is one of the paradoxes of Bierce that while he is anathema to the orthodox, he is, when understood, equally incapable of winning the unalloyed sympathy of the amoral. Bierce had a code of ideals to which he fiercely adhered. His ideas of literature have just been contrasted with his portrait of the actualities of literary endeavor in the United States. He never launched pot-shots in the dark. If he attacked the law and lawyers it was not entirely because the law was full of nonsense and the lawyers full of dishonesty, and consequently the nonsense of one and the dishonesty of the other were beguiling spectacles. It was also because nonsensical law violated his sense of justice and dishonest lawyers his sense of honor. On the hither side of his report of actuality was his high code of what ought to be. Law he defined by a satiric verse:

> Once Law was sitting on the bench,
> And Mercy knelt a-weeping.
> "Clear out!" he cried, "disordered wench!
> Nor come before me creeping
> Upon your knees if you appear,
> 'Tis plain you have no standing here."

Then Justice came. His honor cried:
"*Your* status?—devil seize you!"
"*Amica curiae*," she replied—
"Friend of the court, so please you."
"Begone!" he shouted—"there's the door—
I never saw your face before!"

A lawyer was "one skilled in circumvention of the law." Yet in his essay, "Some Features of the Law," he seriously argues that law should be strongly tempered by justice and mercy, and that lawyers should only defend what they really believe to be the truth.

But whatever the motive behind his onslaughts, when he turned his powers of observation and analysis on a department of life, the report was bitterly veracious. Take war, an activity he knew well. War was a "by-product of the arts of peace." A flag was "a colored rag borne above troops and hoisted on forts and ships. It appears to serve the same purpose as certain signs that one sees on vacant lots in London—'Rubbish may be shot here'." Gunpowder is defined as "an agency employed by civilized nations for the settlement of disputes which might become troublesome if left unadjusted." A cannon became "an instrument employed in the rectification of national boundaries." Soldiers, "Hardened and impenitent man killers." And finally in summary: "It was an ugly and sickening business: to all that was artistic in man's nature, revolting, brutal, in bad taste." Or take politics, "strife of interests masquerading as a contest of principles." Or religion, "a daughter of Hope and Fear explaining to Ignorance the nature of the Unknowable." Or commerce, "a kind of transaction in which A plunders from B the goods of C and for compensation B picks the pockets of D of money belonging to E."

Though Bierce professed a hearty contempt for the "old chestnut about 'tearing down' but not 'building up'—that is to say, effacing one imposture without giving them another in place of it," he nevertheless had pretty accurate notions about what he himself wanted. He didn't advocate them as substitutes for what he tore down. Advocacy is the business of a reformer, not of a satirist and wit—both of which Bierce pre-eminently was. He wanted, for instance, an oligarchical government, a religion whose principles corresponded with those of Christ, and an economic organization conducted by gentlemen for the good of the general. (He seriously proposed the Golden Rule for the guiding principle in the relations of capital and labor!)

He knew what he was after. He was not a disappointed man on a rampage. If that were true we should have to conclude he was disappointed before his writing career began. He was Bitter Bierce in London in the seventies. He began "The Devil's Dictionary" in 1881! His bitterness was not the bitterness of defeat. If he deliberately sought death—which is doubtful since he did not believe in assisting fate—it was because he had no more to say and to an artist that is death. He was serene as he believed all artists should be. But he hated Socialists, slang, emancipated women, reformers, lawyers, casual introductions, labor leaders, divines, William Randolph Hearst, free verse, the new penology, college professors, Chicago—and fat babies.